

Protect your system with increased security measures

Message from the State Drinking Water Manager ...

Due to recent tragic events in our nation, it is important that Idaho's public drinking water systems secure their facilities from external and intentional contamination.

As the primary protectors of public health, water systems must take it upon themselves to assess their vulnerabilities and make the necessary security improvements.

The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) would like to share with you some suggestions for added security and provide guidelines for emergency response planning.

First, however, a few general comments. It is important to note that health experts say that any threat to public water supplies from biological or chemical attacks remains largely remote. Huge volumes of a chemical or biological agent would be needed to overcome the effects of dilution and chlorination.

In addition, DEQ urges all public systems to have an emergency plan in place (see "PWS Emergency Response Plan Guide" at DEQ's web site at http://www2.state.id.us/deq/water/water1.htm#drinking_water (the emergency guide is available on request). If a primary source of drinking water becomes contaminated (either real or appears to be real due to a hoax) or the flow of water is disrupted, your emergency plan will provide you with the action steps you need to take.

If you have already developed an emergency plan for possible accidental releases of chemicals in your system, you can use the same general planning principles for any deliberate, human-caused releases.

Lance E. Nielsen

✓ Guard Against Unplanned Physical Intrusion

- ☐ Assess the vulnerability of source water protection areas, drinking water treatment plants, distribution networks, and other key elements of your water system.
- ☐ Secure manholes, fire hydrants, meter boxes, hatches, and other access points to the water distribution system (it may be necessary to make some of these items tamper-proof).
- ☐ Cover and lock water storage tanks.
- ☐ Make sure that chlorination systems are tamper proof.
- ☐ Lock all doors and set alarms at your office, drinking water well houses, treatment plants, and vaults. Make it a rule that doors are locked and alarms are set.
- ☐ Limit access to facilities and control access to water supply reservoirs, paying close attention to visitors and contractors.
- ☐ Post "Employees Only" signs in restricted areas (in some cases, it may be necessary to post guards at treatment plants).
- ☐ In areas with limited staffing, increase lighting in parking lots, treatment bays, and other areas.
- ☐ Control access to computer networks and control systems, and change the passwords frequently.
- ☐ Do not leave keys in equipment or vehicles at any time.

✓ Coordinate Actions for Emergency Response

- ☐ Review existing emergency response plan, and ensure it is current and relevant.
- ☐ Develop clear procedures and chains-of-command for reporting and responding to threats along with relevant emergency management, law enforcement, environmental and public health officials, consumers, and the media. Practice the emergency procedures regularly.
- ☐ Ensure key utility personnel (both on and off duty) have access to crucial telephone numbers and contact information at all times. Keep the call list up to date.
- ☐ Develop close relationships with local law enforcement agencies, and make sure they know where critical system assets are located. Request they add your facilities to their routine rounds.
- ☐ Report to county or state health officials any illness among the utility's customers that might be associated with water supplies.
- ☐ Ensure that all employees are aware of communications procedures with relevant law enforcement, public health, environmental protection, and emergency response organizations.
- ☐ Provide your customer service staff with training and checklists of how to handle a threat if it is called in.

✓ Provide for Alternate Water Sources

- ☐ All public water systems should plan ahead as to how it will provide alternative safe drinking water during an emergency. Options to consider:
 - bottled water,
 - bulk water provided by certified water haulers – see list of "Certified Idaho Bulk Water Haulers" on DEQ's web site at http://www2.state.id.us/deq/water/water1.htm#drinking_water (list is available on request),
 - develop a new source of water or use an inactive source,
 - if you have excess capacity (e.g., filter beds not in use), consider making this capacity operational as a reserve source,
 - tie-in to an adjacent water supply system, and
 - reservoirs.

✓ Communicate with the Consumer and the Public

- ☐ Prepare communication plans to deal with potential threats and suspected or actual contamination incidents in advance. Consider a "communications command-post" approach to centralize all public notices, press releases, etc.
- ☐ Always alert local and state authorities to potential problems immediately.
- ☐ Encourage and manage communication between you, your staff, and the public. Tell your designated staff what they can tell the public, and then get the word out. No news often translates as bad news.

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Contamination emergencies:

When to call and what to do

What should you do if you believe that there is a suspected or intentional contamination or intrusion into your public water supply system or facility?

You need to call Idaho's Com Center immediately (telephone number listed below), which will trigger an emergency response telephone conference between you and various state and local officials. These individuals, trained in their areas of expertise, will advise you how to proceed.

When should you call the Com Center?

You should call when your system may have experienced any of the following scenarios:

- Physical security is compromised or there is obvious evidence of accidental or malicious intrusion.
- There is evidence of vandalism that may suggest intrusion leading to an added vulnerability of the system (e.g., hole in fences or gates, barbed wire cut, locksets removed or destroyed, etc.).
- Suspicious materials have been found around a site which is part of, or associated with, a public water supply (e.g., discarded packaging, plastic bags, unlabeled and discarded containers, evidence of marks indicating devices were dragged across the ground, vehicle tracks, etc.).
- An anonymous threat directed at a facility.

What to do

- ☐ If your concern meets any of the "when-should-you-call" circumstances shown directly above and you suspect intentional and criminal contamination, contact **Idaho's Com Center at 1-800-632-8000**. If that telephone number is busy, call the **alternative Com Center telephone number: 1-208-846-7610**. *Clearly indicate that your call concerns a threat to a drinking water system.*
- ☐ For those systems that chlorinate, maintain adequate chlorine residual.
- ☐ Notify your customers not to drink the water until you notify them that the water is safe to drink.
- ☐ Keep your customers informed.

Communicate with the Consumer, continued

- ☐ Some of the messages that will be important to your customers:
 - where the problem is,
 - where the problem is NOT,
 - that you are responding,
 - any actions your customers should take, and
 - that you will keep them informed.

✓ **Other Precautions you can take**

- ☐ Ensure that adequate supplies of chemicals and repair parts are on hand.
- ☐ Consider advance placement of contracts for some major parts or repairs so they can be accessed quickly in case of an emergency.
- ☐ Keep finished water storage levels maximized for interruptions, fire suppression, and other emergencies.
- ☐ Keep fuel tanks in all fleet vehicles filled. Keep adequate fuel on hand for any backup equipment (e.g., generators) you may have.
- ☐ Conduct background security checks on employees at hiring and periodically thereafter.
- ☐ Arrange for a security audit. Get some expert advice on where and how your system may be vulnerable.

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Remember, for contamination events not associated with criminal activity, please continue to contact the DEQ regional office or district health department with whom you regularly communicate.

For more information regarding security, contact your local DEQ regional office at six locations throughout the state.

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DEPARTMENT OF
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
1410 North Hillton
Boise, Idaho 83706-1290



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